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SPEECH

OF

HON. JAMES MEACHAM, OF VERMONT,

ON

KANSAS AFFAIRS,

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, APRIL 30, 1856.



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## KANSAS AFFAIRS.

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The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. MEACHAM said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: In rising to address the committee at this time I cannot fail to be reminded that you\* and I have been here together before; nor can I fail to recall the scenes through which we passed six years since. Then, as now, there was an agitation in regard to the Territories of this Union; and I believe there was a great deal more animosity on the subject than there is even now. The Territories were different, but the same principles lay at the bottom of the agitation then and now. Time has passed on, and dealt far more kindly with you than with me; and upon your healthy and joyous countenance there are far fewer marks of the plow-share, and far fewer furrows upon your brow than upon mine. I cannot but be reminded that there are now only about fifteen men here who were together then. I have said, sir, that the principles which we were agitating at that time—although in relation to different Territories—were the same as those we are agitating now. And you will recognize the fact that probably never, in the history of the world, has there been agitation in relation to territories so rich, so large, so fertile, and in their anticipated destinies so prosperous, as those then and now under consideration.

We often, in reading a book, find out on a re-perusal a good many things of importance which we had passed over in the first reading. It was so in reading the last presidential message. There

are eighteen columns of the Congressional Globe occupied in it. The President has discussed in ten columns our condition as to war and peace, the Army, and the Navy, and the revenue, and the tariff, and the public lands, and then he has gone abroad and discussed our foreign relations. And after he had gone over the whole American continent, and gone abroad over the rest of the world, he comes home and devotes eight columns out of eighteen in reference to the controversy between the North and South. Eight mortal columns of the Congressional Globe are devoted to the agitation of slavery; and throughout the whole he lays the entire blame upon the North, and excuses in every respect, and in every possible way, the South!

Now remember by whom that is done. It is done by a President whose nomination was made at Baltimore, where the party was pledged that the man coming into power should not agitate the subject of slavery, and should not promote sectional agitation. The President himself came out in a speech, and promised the same thing. He came out afterwards in his inaugural, and repeated the pledge over and over again. It was repeated again through the votes which he got in this House. After all that, there stands the eight columns of agitation. And I venture to say—and I say candidly and honestly—that, of all the abolition documents that ever I read, I never read eight columns better calculated to promote sectional agitation than these eight columns of the President's message. No such thing can be found in any other official document of the United States.

\*Mr. COBB, of Georgia, in the chair.



One of the points which the President makes is the aggression inflicted on the South by the North. I will read an extract from the message:

"It is impossible to present this subject as truth and the occasion require, without noticing the reiterated but groundless allegation, that the South has persistently asserted claims and obtained advantages in the practical administration of the General Government, to the prejudice of the North, and in which the latter has acquiesced. That is, the States, which either promote or tolerate attacks on the rights of persons and of property in other States, to disguise their own injustice, pretend or imagine, and constantly aver, that they, whose constitutional rights are thus systematically assailed, are themselves the aggressors. At the present time, this imputed aggression, resting, as it does, only in the vague, declamatory charges of political agitators, resolves itself into misapprehension, or misinterpretation, of the principles and facts of the political organization of the new Territories of the United States."

[Mr. MEACHAM then proceeded to exhibit a colored map of Texas, to show what portion of the Territory was given to freedom, and what to slavery.]

Where is now (said he) the territory which was then declared free? It has been given over to New Mexico and Kansas, with the permission to fill it with slavery if they please. There [indicating it on the map] is the southern boundary of Kansas, and that has gone into Kansas with the permission to fill that with slaves. The only portion of free territory which remains of all that we were to have is just that little red patch. It is a degree and a half of longitude in length, and half a degree of latitude in width. That is what remains. There is the promise made to us, and there is the manner in which it is kept. That little patch of territory is all we have to show that the free States were ever recognized in the distribution. There was once, as you will remember from reading Prescott, a territory in the mountains of Mexico. It was a republic; and while the hosts of Spain were pouring over all the rest of Mexico, that little republic maintained its independence for fifty years, and so perfectly determined were they to maintain their independence, that they were fifty years without ever tasting salt, because they could not get down to the ocean. I trust the time will come when in these settled Territories there will be a body of republicans who will have the same spirit and determination to maintain their freedom, come what will. I have shown you, then, what has become of that portion of territory. There [indicating it] is what the slave States have got, and there is what the free States have got.

The President has made the establishment of the Missouri compromise line one of the great aggressions of the North against the South. That

line has been broken up—we think, unjustly broken up. It was made by our fathers and ratified by their children. But there was something promised in the place of that line. What was it? It was that the people in Kansas should have the right to govern themselves. And the great struggle is, at the present hour, not whether we will restore the Missouri compromise, but whether they will keep the promise made, when that compromise was abrogated, to the ear, and break it to the hope?

A year before the Nebraska and Kansas bill was passed, another bill was passed by this House for the organization of this Territory; and I believe it gave joy throughout the whole land. It contained no provision in it for the abrogation of any compromise. It stood before us as free territory, and emigrants said, "We will go to that Territory, the inheritance of our fathers, and we will keep it free. We will go there fearless of any encroachment upon the part of slavery; we will go there and enjoy a free State." But another year came, and another bill came along with it. That bill promised that every man who went there should go there upon an equality with every other man, so far as political rights were concerned.

Now, sir, all the new territories settled by the Old World were settled in masses; men did not go out singly from their homes. It was so in the settlements made in this country. Such was the fact in the settlement of Virginia, of South Carolina, of Connecticut, of Massachusetts.

But, sir, we hear a great deal of complaint in these days about emigration aid societies. Now, suppose that here is a company of men coming from London to Plymouth. Suppose a hundred men were to come, and you see a man rushing to the king, breathless, exclaiming, "Why, men are emigrating here in masses!" "Well, what of it?" "Why, they have no right to come here in masses. Let every man row his own boat. Let them come singly, and I will not object, but here they come in whole ship-loads."

Well, sir, there was an emigrant aid society for the encouragement of the Plymouth colony. Every man who came to Plymouth Rock mortgaged his services for ten years, in order that he might have his expenses paid, and an allowance for his support after he arrived.

And the same thing might be said in respect to the emigration from Greece to Asia Minor, Italy, and Sicily. Those who emigrated were generally persons composing a minority who, having been defeated in their political struggles, did not care

to be taunted with it, and hence they preferred going to a foreign country. But they were in a different situation in some respects. They went out without law—*independent of law*—with the right to make their own laws. But there was another thing in regard to these emigrant aid societies; those who stayed at home were bound to pay the expenses of those who went abroad. This was just as much a settled law in that community as any other law that ever existed there.

There was another emigration which, in one respect, and only one, bears a resemblance to those who are now going West. There was a body of men who went out from a certain country for the purpose of going to the land of freedom. That was their professed mission. Well, sir, they obtained permission to go; and on a certain night, by the help of emigrant aid societies, they started. On that night there were three millions of people started out from Egypt. There were among them six hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms. But Pharaoh said that was too much. These men were emigrating in too large masses, and he started out after them—not to control them at the ballot-box, but to hinder them from going. But he did not hinder them. They started out for the promised land, not one fifth part of the distance to Kansas, but they did not go directly there. In the course of two years, however, they came to a river, which only separated them from the promised land. They were not, however, fit to enter, and they turned back into the wilderness; and, after thirty-eight years, these six hundred thousand men, capable of bearing arms, again arrived at the promised land; they crossed the river, and freedom was theirs. They were then trained men—every man trained to his place.

There is a body of men—not going out of Egypt—but from the northern country to the West. They are not going there armed. They are in practice unacquainted with arms; but they will have their training if it be necessary. They will break the depths of the forest gloom as they tramp their way through the wilderness, and the wilderness will shake beneath their tread, because it will be the tread of a host of freemen. But there will be no going back.

Well, we are told that northern men have always backed out, and that they will back out on this occasion. No, sir; we have got where we cannot back out. Why taunt the men who hold for the right of the admission of Kansas into the Union as men lacking courage and high patriotic spirit? They are descendants of good men always earnest in the cause of freedom. Heman Allen,

as one of the Representatives of Vermont, showed himself a strong assailant of slavery at the time of the admission of Arkansas, and it was thought fit to sneer at him as buried “way off up in the mountains.” Go and stand by the grave of Heman Allen. There will be presented one of the finest scenes ever presented to the eye of man. Could you lengthen your vision, and clip the top of the mountain forests, you might see Arnold on his perilous way to Quebec. You may see him wounded. You may see where Wolfe fell, and where Montgomery died. You may track that army when pestilence hung over it, and death was dripping from her wings. You will see Burgoyne starting his career on the lake, and making his way down to Saratoga. Then you will see him returning, and the splendid presents for the Indians, brought by him, disposed of in a manner, and for a purpose far different from that for which they were intended, just as the marble brought into Greece to rear a monument at Marathon. That monument went up on the same spot, but it went up to show the victory of the Greeks and the vanquishment of the Persians. From that spot you may see the battle of Bennington. You may see that fleet going down Lake George in the French war, with its music, and its banners flying. You may see the battle of Plattsburg. You may see the spot where Scott won his glory. There is the place where sleeps the freeman Allen.

There is another thing on which I wish to speak. I refer to the emigrant aid societies. The largest emigrant aid society ever known is the *Government of the United States*. It began its career to stimulate immigration more than fifty years ago. How? In protecting squatters, making preemption laws, homestead bills, and giving donations of the public lands to actual settlers. Just to make the point clear, let me refer to what has been done in reference to the Territory of Oregon. In 1852 we passed a law giving to every actual settler in that Territory, if single, three hundred and twenty, or, if married, six hundred and forty acres. It was to continue for two years; but when that time had expired, it was extended two years more. It expired in December last by its own limitation. Look at it. Six hundred and forty acres to every man who would go to Oregon! Two hundred thousand acres were pledged as a gift to actual settlers, if they would go there. President Pierce takes the executive chair. I suppose he knows what has been done; yet, notwithstanding this, when a little emigrant aid society is seen in Massachusetts, the Pres-



ident, and all in authority, are in the utmost consternation. They are raising signals of distress, and sending proclamations all over the land. What for? What is the matter? They want to stop emigration from Massachusetts to the West—an emigration which has been stimulated for the past half century by acts of Congress. Look at the consistency of conduct there is here. But they do not care a rush for these aid societies. A bird feigns to be wounded, and lures the hunter far from the spot where she was first seen. She goes limping, fluttering, and screaming, to attract attention. Why does she do so? She wants to prevent her nest and its eggs from being touched. That is just the case here. They do not care a fig about these emigrant aid societies. It is only a blind.

I do not intend to occupy my full time now, for I hope, if anything is brought back in the nature of evidence by the commission we have sent to that Territory, I may be able to take part in the discussion then. Indeed, until that masterly report of the minority in the Senate, I could hardly see a single fact upon which you could rest with any degree of reliance whatever. But, I ask you, how were northern emigrants treated? On the 30th of May, 1854, we passed that law for the organization of Nebraska and Kansas. Just twenty-nine days after that, the men of Missouri formed an association to drive out from that Territory, to hurl out of it by force, every man who came into it by the assistance of northern emigrant aid societies. The plan must have been laid, and the knowledge in regard to that law must have been conveyed to that Territory, before the law was passed. Now, that was the welcome which awaited freemen when they went into that Territory? I know it is said that "If you do not like it, stay at home; we will just make that Territory so hot that you cannot stay there: we will go and occupy it ourselves, and make it a slave Territory." But how were they treated? Did they receive at the hands of those who had gone there from the State of Missouri anything like hospitality, anything like courtesy, anything like justice, when they went to that strange land? Instead of that, when the first election came off they were driven from the ballot-boxes by force, and those who usurped their places had things their own way.

Now, I maintain that the Kansas people are to blame in some measure. They were altogether too modest. They had a way, up in Vermont, of dealing with intruders from abroad, which is worthy of imitation in spirit, if not in form.

New York claimed a portion of that State as her own, nearly to the mountains. They sent there officers to execute the process of that State. The Vermonters told them they could not have such matters going on in their State, and that they must stop. They did not do it. They caught one of the officers and tied him to a tree, and laid upon him what they called a "beech seal," which grows in the woods in the shape of what boys call switches. They gave him a thorough dressing; told him to go home, and if he came there again, he would never leave the State alive; and I never heard of the man's coming back to get the beech seal renewed.

The Kansas people ought to have taken some measures to show that they were in earnest, and that they were not to be trampled in the dust, even if they had to use lead and steel. And I say to them now, peace man as I am, that, before I would surrender and be driven from the Territory, I would use lead and steel, and every other metal which God has placed in the earth.

I know there are doubts expressed whether there were votes cast by Missourians in the election. But Noah might just as well have doubted whether there had been a deluge when he got up on the top of Mount Ararat. [Laughter.] Just look at the returns. As I said before, I am not going into this matter at length, because we expect information soon upon which we can rely confidently. But here is one district which has got two hundred and forty-seven voters, and four hundred and eighty-six votes; another which has four hundred and eighty-six voters, and one thousand two hundred and six votes; another which has twenty-four voters, and three hundred and thirty-one votes. More than five thousand votes were cast by Missourians in that election, while they were driving all the freemen of Kansas from their places—compelling them to leave, and forbidding them upon peril of their lives to return.

There are two Legislatures, and they have sent on here two Delegates. We have not decided between them; perhaps we never shall. It is our business most certainly to do it. Those who have resisted it the strongest, have said we have the right to do it. If we have the right to make the decision, we have the right, at the same time, to make the examination which precedes the decision; and we are not to be stopped, and blocked up, and driven out of the way, because there has been a Legislature which has acted wrong.

I know the same party says we may rely upon the court. They trust the court; so do I. I have always trusted the court, and believe I always



shall. I remember a scene which gave peculiar strength to that feeling of confidence in the court. You remember when the Congressional Library was burned, and apparently all the men of the city were gathered here to put out the fire. There was a score of engines upon the track to the reservoir, and perhaps a thousand men in the rotunda and its avenues. I saw I could do nothing there; and as an eminent counsel, then a Senator from Vermont, was about to make an argument in the Supreme Court, I went to that place, and there were the court, just as calm as ever I saw them in my life. You could hear the clank, clank, of a score of engines, and the tramp, tramp, tramp, of a thousand men, echoing through the room, but there they sat, attending to their business, perfectly unmoved. I looked upon that body of men, and admired them for their composure in their situation. But I thought of another thing. There might come the time when there would be not only the agitation of fire and water, but there may be political agitation. The political elements may be heaving up and showing their power, and then that body of men will sit in their places and do their duty as calmly as they are doing it now. I will trust to that court.

But I will not put into the hands of this court what does not belong to it; and with that Kansas election case the court has nothing whatever to do. We are to decide it for ourselves, and should do so at once frankly and fearlessly. It must be admitted that those who attempt to eject the settlers from Kansas have some very efficient helps.

I will read another extract from the President's message:

"In the Territory of Kansas there have been acts prejudicial to good order, but as yet none have occurred under circumstances to justify the interposition of the Federal Executive. That could only be in case of obstruction to Federal law, or of organized resistance to territorial law, assuming the character of insurrection; which, if it should occur, it would be my duty promptly to overcome and suppress. I cherish the hope, however, that the occurrence of any such untoward event will be prevented by the sound sense of the people of the Territory, who, by its organic law, possessing the right to determine their own domestic institutions, are entitled, while deporting themselves peacefully, to the free exercise of that right, and must be protected in the enjoyment of it, without interference on the part of the citizens of any of the States."

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"But long afterwards, when, by the proposed accession of the Republic of Texas, the United States were to take their next step in territorial greatness, a similar contingency occurred, and became the occasion for systematized attempts to interfere in the domestic affairs of one section of the Union, in defiance of their rights as States and of the stipulations of the Constitution. These attempts assumed a practical direction, in the shape of persevering endeavors, by some of the Representatives in both Houses of Congress, to deprive the southern States of the supposed benefit of the

provisions of the act authorizing the organization of the State of Missouri.

"It has been matter of painful regret to see States, conspicuous for their services in founding this Republic, and equally sharing its advantages, disregard their constitutional obligations to it. Although conscious of their inability to heal admitted and palpable social evils of their own, and which are completely within their jurisdiction, they engage in the offensive and hopeless undertaking of reforming the domestic institutions of other States wholly beyond their control and authority. In the vain pursuit of ends, by them entirely unattainable, and which they may not legally attempt to compass, they peril the very existence of the Constitution, and all the countless benefits which it has conferred. While the people of the southern States confine their attention to their own affairs, not presuming officiously to intermeddle with the social institutions of the northern States, too many of the inhabitants of the latter are permanently organized in associations to inflict injury on the former, by wrongful acts, which would be cause of war as between foreign Powers, and only fail to be such in our system, because perpetrated under cover of the Union."

When I first read that, sir, I thought it would turn out an impartial statement of what was necessary to be done if there had been an intrusion into that Territory by the freemen as against the Missourians, or by the Missourians as against the freemen. But there is a single expression which removes any doubt, and rescues from any interpretation which charity might wish to cast over it; and that is, the words "domestic institutions."

There is another helper of the Missourians. Vice President Atchison leaves his high and dignified place to take part in the low, unmanly border scuffles, goading on the men of his State to deeds of violence and misrule. The country looks on that man as degraded and debauched in his principles when he voluntarily swears his presence at the Kansas elections, with pistol and stiletto, like a political marauder.

Now, there is another thing which may be mentioned, to show the manner in which this Legislature was elected, and which removes the least shadow of doubt as to its illegality; and that is, that it proceeded immediately to legislate against freemen, by passing its gag law, its alien-sedition law, or whatever else you may call it, to muzzle the mouth of every man against uttering a sentiment in relation to slavery, by making it a penal offense, punishable with five years' imprisonment. Now, I do not know how many men may subject themselves to that penalty; but I can tell you one thing—and I rest my honor and name upon it—that if you put a freeman into a bastille in Kansas, he will not be there a week before there will not be even a key of it left to send to Washington. There will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

Well, that is not the end of it. Another man



says—and the course, I believe, is intended, if they can carry out and put their plans in execution—that he would not put the offenders in prison, but would hang them until they are dead, dead, dead. It was once said that Foote was a hangman and he had that reputation. It was understood when a certain gentleman came from a certain quarter of the country and went to New York, and made a speech there, that he (Foote) was in danger of his laurels; and it was shown that he was. It now seems that he is surpassed by his subalterns. Now, what is the meaning of this? Why, that it is put forward here from the Senate of the United States, that that is to be the law paramount—that Lynch-law is to go into operation—that men who would make assertions against slavery would be hung on the spot till they are dead, dead, dead.

I have shown in what manner these men have been treated, and are now treated. But what is to be done? My proposition in respect to this Territory, and to make peace in it, is to admit it at once into the Union as a State. I am willing to allow it to do so. And my reason is very plain—and I will be frank about it. It is because it will be made a free State. But there is one thing to be considered; those who do not wish it to turn out in that way have made a promise to Congress—have made it to their constituents and their States and to the country and to the world. What is that promise? The promise is this: that whenever the people of the Territory shall form a republican government they shall be admitted into the Union, either with or without slavery, as they shall themselves choose. Now the people of Kansas have formed a government. They have done so of their own choice. They have complied in every respect with the requisition made.

Now I say that those men who laid down that platform—who established those doctrines—are bound to come forward, and recognize, and act upon them. I know very well that it will be said the Territory has not sufficient population to be admitted as a State; but it has a larger population than many of the States which have been admitted into the Union. I have been favored very kindly by the chairman of the Committee on Territories with a list of those States which have been admitted with the smallest amount of pop-

ulation. It is believed that forty-five to fifty thousand read the statement:

*Admitted.*

*White population.*

Tennessee...	June 1, 1796, had by census of 1790,	32,013
Indiana.....	Dec. 11, 1816, had by census of 1810,	23,890
Louisiana....	April 8, 1812, had by census of 1810,	34,311
Mississippi..	Dec. 10, 1817, had by census of 1820,	43,176
Arkansas....	June 15, 1836, had by census of 1830,	25,671
Florida.....	Mar. 3, 1845, had by census of 1840,	27,943
Michigan....	Jan. 26, 1837, had by census of 1830,	31,346

It will be seen by this statement that a large number of States, with a population far less than Kansas now has, were admitted; so that this cannot properly be urged as an objection, and I do not know of any other that can be brought forward. The people of Kansas have certainly proceeded regularly, so far as I know; and I propose, therefore, to offer in the House the following resolution:

*Resolved, THAT THE COMMITTEE ON THE TERRITORIES BE INSTRUCTED TO BRING IN A BILL FOR THE IMMEDIATE ADMISSION OF KANSAS AS A STATE, WITH THE REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION THAT SHE HAS PRESENTED TO THIS HOUSE.*

If the present controversy goes on, it will grow more bitter every day it lasts. I believe that, for the peace of that State, of the neighboring States, and of the country, Kansas should be made a State. Let them have a State government of their own choice. Let them settle down to it, and there will be peace. We ought to have peace; we can have peace; we must have peace. It will be a shame to us to resort to physical violence needlessly. But let one party—either party—let the Missourians, or anybody, go and settle down there, and fortify themselves with the threat to hurl out every man that comes there from a free State, and the freemen of the country will not rest. They will besiege the citadel and scale its battlements, no matter how stout may be the fortress, for freedom has a voice of thunder, and freedom will be heard—not with a still small voice, but will be heard in the controversy in the place where Gog and Magog go out to battle. Depend upon it, if it must come—it may not come soon—but if it must come, the voice of freemen will be heard and will be heeded; the snorting of their horses will be heard from Dan; and the whole land will tremble with the neighing of their strong ones.

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